DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 206 065 EA 013 802

AUTHOR Pitner, N. J.
TITLE Administrator Training: What Relationship to Administrator Work?
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 14p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, CA, April 13-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education: Administrator Role: Administrators: Educational Administration: Elementary Secondary Education: Higher Education: Job Analysis: Job Skills: *Management Development: Professional Associations
IDENTIFIERS Project Leadership

ABSTRACT

Studies consistently indicate that the characteristics required of administrators in the performance of their duties are not the characteristics required of students seeking advanced degrees in administration. Consideration of research into the characteristics of administrators, their work, and their training leads to several important conclusions: administrative work requires cognitive skills, managerial skills, and energy: administrator training should be tied to the requirements of the job: school administrators feel they are unprepared for the realities of managerial work: school administrators prefer to be trained by other administrators: learning laboratories could help turn theory into practice: and, while universities are suited to the transmission of cognitive information, other agencies are more appropriate for practical training. The Project Leadership training model attempts to act on some of these conclusions, calling for practicing administrators to train other administrators in 90-minute workshop sessions. The process of developing and testing the training model revealed several problems in the model's format, but also demonstrated values in the collaboration of universities and professional associations in program development: in the involvement of administrators in training administrators: and in the conscious articulation of course work and real life situations and problems. (Author/PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED206065

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING: WHAT RELATIONSHIP TO ADMINISTRATOR WORK?

N. J. Pitner

University of Oregon

Presented at AERA Annual Meeting in
Los Angeles, California
April 13-17, 1981

EA 013 802

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. J. Pitner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The lack of a positive relationship between formal preparation, administrative work, and administrator effectiveness has been noted by many of our colleagues.[1] In the preliminary findings of a study comparing the resolution of conflict by superintendents and city managers, Zeigler[2] found that superintendents with doctorates were less effective in resolving conflict than city managers and superintendents without advanced degrees. He posits that the skills superintendents possess--technical expertise--are irrelevant and dysfunctional in conflict situations. Similarly, Erickson[3] uncovered a relationship between instructional flexibility of elementary schools and the extent of the principal's preparation in educational administration. The less flexible schools were managed by principals with more graduate training. Are we suggesting that the more we train administrators the more inadequate they become? Using Veblen's term, Bridges claims that the result of our efforts is trained incompacity.[4] Administrators also express extreme dissatisfaction with the adequacy of their university training. Many report that they are unprepared for the realities of managerial work. Principals appear to be unable to bring any special body of knowledge or set of unique skills to the position. They believe they perform adequately but wish to perform exceedingly well.[5] (We should note here that the denigration of training is a phenomena of many occupations.)

This desire translates into an insatiable appetite for training beyond university preparation; specifically for workshops providing instant solutions to pressing problems which are led by other administrators. Administrators meet, drink coffee, nibble on sweet rolls, and swap stories. Recurring concerns at many of these professional meetings are: We are not doing what we

should be doing. What should we be doing? We never seem to have enough time. There appears to be an external quest for a clearer understanding of what the job entails and how to go about doing the job more effectively. Have university programs in educational administration left principals woefully unprepared?

Today, we shall consider this persistent lack of a positive relationship between formal preparation and administrative work by examining the descriptive studies of administrative work, the relationship of that work to administrator preparation and training, and an NIE funded project at the University of Oregon which is attempting to couple research dissemination with administrator inservice training. We will use this information to formulate a recommendation for a new approach to the training of school administrators.

Descriptive Studies of Administrative Work

What do educational administrators do? Several empirical, observational studies of superintendents;[6] principals;[7] and assistant principals[8] provide a description of the everyday work of school administrators. Administrative work is characterized by:

(1) a low degree of self-initiated tasks,

(2) many activities of short duration,

(3) discontinuity due to interruptions,

(4) the needs of others in the organization, superseding prior plans,

(5) face-to-face verbal contacts with one other person,

(6) variability of tasks,

(7) an extensive network of individuals/groups internal and external to the school/district,

(8) a hectic and upredictable flow of work,

(9) numerous unimportant decisions and trivial agendas,

(10) few attempts at written communication,

(11) events occuring in or near the administrator's office,

(12) interactions predominately with subordinates, and

(13) a preference for problems and information that are specific rather than general; concrete, solvable, and currently pressing.

The aforementioned studies have remained fairly consistent in their findings about administrative work.[9]

The Relationship of Training to Administrative Work

Using this descriprion, Bridges[10] compared the work of the student with the work of the administrator: (1) the rhythm of work, (2) the characteristics of communication related to work, and (3) the role of emotions in work. The slower work pace, the passive work environment, the emphasis on the written communication medium, the placid emotional environment are characteristics of the student's work which are unlike the thirteen characteristics of administrative work we have already noted. He concluded that current administrator training is of questionable value: it neither fulfills the technical nor the social demands of the role.[11] Assuming these characteristics, what abilities does the principal's job require?

On the one hand, one can infer that the job requires substantial cognitive ability. The discontinuity and the variety of tasks, decision making under conditions of uncertainty, plus the pace of the work seem to suggest that a school administrator must have a highly developed repertoire of critical thinking skills. Administrators face an unending stream of activities, people, and problems; the work demands that administrators be able to quickly shift mental and emotional gears. This interpretation suggests analytical skills that might be taught. March[12] identified five critical analytical skills that are central to the job of most high level administrators: the analysis

of expertise, the analysis of coalitions, the analysis of ambiguity, the analysis of time, and the analysis of information. Each of these skills is linked closely to the everyday requirements of managerial life.

On the other hand, the job can be regarded as demanding less mental discipline, and more nervous energy. Some important administrative tasks have relatively small intellectual components If nervous energy is the key, then perhaps coffee, sweet rolls, and inspiration are all that administrators need to adequately perform their role.

Returning to the characteristics of administrative work, the structure and content of administrative work has substantial implications for the structure and content of university based pre-service preparation and in-service administrator training. First, the verbal mode, task initiation, task variety, and the pace of managerial work suggest that the administrator must be able to think and speak "on his feet." The suggestion is not to eliminate writing from university courses but to provide opportunities for verbal expression (e.g., use a socratic method to train for eliciting a clear, articulate expression about the content under study). Hectic pace, task variety, and task initiation suggest that we should scramble the work, make assignments at the last minute with short completion times, and vary the learning episodes--use case study and simulation materials. Adult learning theory points to the use of learning laboratories--experiential learning--for applying theory to practice. Central to "what" (content) and "how" (structure) of administrative training is a viewpoint expressed by March that "the advantage of the university in the training of administrators is primarily in the intellective domain."[13] Non university agencies might more appropriately train administrators in less cognitive, but still essential, learnings.

These observations about school administrator work and training are important in suggesting a direction for a new training model. Let's review what we have discussed thus far:

1. Administrative work requires cognitive skills, managerial skills, and energy.
2. Administrator training should be tied to the requirements of the job.
3. School administrators claim they are unprepared for the realities of managerial work.
4. School adminstrators prefer to be trained by other administrators.
5. Characteristics of adult learning point to learning laboratories for applying theory to practice.
6. The university is best suited for training administrators in the intellective domain. The less cognitive--but still essential--learnings are more appropriately the domain of non university agencies.

If one were to take these statements as suggestions for training, what would these suggestions be, and how could they be realized? Many others have made similar observations and recommendations for administrator training.[14] These observations are not new, yet they have not significantly altered training programs.[15]

Drawing upon these observations, we car develop a new concept of administrator training; one that builds on the strengths of the institutions currently involved in the training of administrators. The NIE project at the University of Oregon is a venture in which the University and three administrator professional associations are working collaboratively to improve administrator training.

NIE Project at the University of Oregon

The "Project to Develop and Test a Training Model for the Purpose of Disseminating Research" began in the Center for Educational Policy and Management during August, 1980. The emphasis of the project is to disseminate

research results through administrative training. The training model that is being tested as a vehicle for research dissemination is know as Project Leadership and was developed by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). The research project requires the collaboration of the University of Oregon and the professional associations in California, Oregon, and Washington.

Project Leadership is a training program for adminstrators which uses practicing administrators as teachers of other administrators. Twenty five scripted workshop guides have been developed by ACSA covering skills and knowledge pertinent to administrative work: time management, needs assessment, shared decision making, improving school climate, school public relations, contract management, and communication skills. The quality of the content is not consistent across the topic and borders on folklore, instead of the state of the art in certain fields. These guide, have been developed by practicing administrators. Each guide includes lecturettes, activities, and transparencies for a 90 minute workshop. These guides are used by selected administrator presenters in a large statewide conference. Following a statewide conference, (during which participants attend many 90 minute workshops) liaison administrators meet with participants in regional centers. They assist the participants in applying new information in their particular context and provide feedback in reference to desired learning outcomes.

The University of Oregon this year is assisting two states in its implementation of the Project Leadership structure and is redeveloping 8 of the 25 management training packages. We are integrating the best research findings into the folkwisdom and practical applications already existing in the guides. We act as translators or interpreters of research results for

practitioners. For example, in the time management package we have added the research information about what administrators do, and in the evaluation packet we have added the research information about time on task.

There are several problems related to the present format. First, what can you convey about decision making that is worthwhile and useful in 90 minutes? While this 90 minute format might coincide with the length of time an administrator can sit still, it does not correspond to the amount and kind of material available on all topics. Ninety minutes is also not a sufficient amount of time to develop skills. Second, administrators tend to identify inservice topics based upon what is currently "hot," such as, stress management. Thus, we are restricted in curriculum development by the semantic environment of educational administrators. Managerial talk carves up the work of organizations in a particular way. It isolates certain phenomena and certain implications. The everyday labels get in the way of restructuring the content of training. Second, administrators tend to identify inservice topics based upon what is currently "hot", such as, stress management. Thus, we are restricted in curriculum development by the semantic environment of educational administrators. Managerial talk carves up the work of organizations in a particular way. It isolates certain phenomena and certain implications. The everyday labels get in the way or restructuring the content of training. Third, for administrators the benefit of Project Leadership is not as a source of technical knowledge but for the stroking behaviors from other administrators--demonstration of and reassurance that they are doing something with respect to their frustrations in their work and powerless position. Fourth, recent work by Lacata and Hack (1981) investigates the informal interactions between principals and suggests that norms

and beliefs of principals such as the contextual idiosyncrasy, fear of being seen as incompetent, and trust variability might neutralize what is believed to be positive about Project Leadership.

Yet, this research project and Project Leadership, have some components that stimulate a new direction in administrator preparation. These projects suggest a way:

1. for universities to collaborate with professional associations in the delivery of training. The wolves, after all, are at our doorstep. In California, the administrator association is working vigorously to legitimize their role in administrator preparation and to limit the university's influence. Ignoring this pressure will not make it go away. In addition, shrinking financial resources provides additional impetus for cooperating with other institutions in the delivery of training.

2. to involve administrators in the training of other administrators, and

3. to provide a conscious articulation between course work and real life situations and problems.

Recommendation

What would a new program look like? First, the content of administrator training needs to be reexamined. The problem is now to collate the information on administrative work: collect and compare it carefully and critically and integrate it without regard to the everyday labels used to describe administrative work, and use that information to develop a model program at the master's or post master's level where the majority of educational administrators are trained, not at the doctorate. The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) could work jointly on this task. Second, the proper sequencing of content should be specified--preservice or inservice. Third, the proper domain for each segment of content must be determined: who should have responsibility

for teaching the content--the university or practicing administrators--and how will content be delivered (e.g., through Project Leadership in the state administrator associations).

Thus, a student might spend the summer at the university taking administration courses in the intellective domain and during the school year participate in workshops which provide a conscious articulation between theory and practice or train administrators in less cognitive, skill-oriented material relevant to the position for which certification is taught. Graduate credit would be earned in all cases.

This plan calls for careful integration of efforts, it does not mean the abandonment of the university's responsibility. This does not suggest that the fundamental role of the university in the training of administrators will disappear. Nor does it mean that the professional training program would exclude opportunities for intellectual growth only loosely tied to immediately usable administrative skills. It would mean, however, that the university would legitimize practicing administrators teaching other administrators in a specified area within a planned framework. Administrators training one another would become an essential component of the program of studies. It does not mean that the School Law course is occasionally taught by a superintendent instead of the faculty member with formal legal preparation, or that administrators act as guest lecturers in university classes. Courses would be clearly designated university taught or administrator association taught. Within this kind of framework it would be possible to attend to the shortcomings of administrator preparation without polluting the waters of the university or the non university agencies.

Summary

A new model for administrator training was proposed based upon some observations about administrator work and training. The new model draws upon the strengths of a training model developed by the Association of California School Administrators known as Project Leadership which is currently being tested as a vehicle for research dissemination at the Center for Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon.

NOTES

[1]See Bridges, E. The Nature of Leadership. In L. Cunningham, W. Hack, and R. Nystrand (Eds.) Educational Administration: The Developing Decades. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1977; March, J. Analytical Skills and the University Training of Educational Administrators. The Journal of Educational Administration, 1974, 1, 17-44; Zeigler, H. Final Report for the Pilot Study on Conflict Management. Eugene, Oregon, Center for Educational Policy and Management, University of Oregon, 1980.

[2]Zeigler, H. Final Report for the Pilot Study on Conflict Management.

[3]Erickson, D., Hills, R., and Robinson, N. Educational Flexibility in an Urban School District. Vancouver, British Columbia: Educational Research Institute of British Columbia, 1970.

[4]Bridges, E. The Nature of Leadership.

[5]Wolcott, H. The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

[6]See Campbell, R. and Cunningham, L. Observations of Administrator Behavior. Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago, 1959; Mintzberg, H. The Nature of Managerial Work. New York: Harper and Row, 1973; Pitner, N. So Go the Days of Their Lives: A Descriptive Study of the Superintendency. OSSC Bulletin, Eugene, Oregon: Oregon School Study Council, 1979; Duignan, P. Administration Behavior of School Superintendents: A Descriptive Study. The Journal of Educational Administration, 1980, 1, 5-26; Pitner, N. Hormones and Harems: Are the Activities of Superintending Different for a Woman? In W. W. Charters and P. Schmuck (Eds.), Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials. San Diego, California: Academic Press, Inc. (in press).

[7]See Wolcott, H. The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973; Peterson, K. The Principal's Tasks. Administrator's Notebook, 1978, 8; Crowson, R. and Porter-Gehrie, C. The Discretionary Behavior of Principals in Large City Schools. Educational Administration Quarterly, 1980, 1, 45-69; Willis, Q. The Work Activity of School Principals: An Observational Study. The Journal of Educational Administration, 1980, 1, 27-54; Morris, V. The Work of the Urban Principal: A Detailed View from Field Research. Paper presented at the 1981 AERA Annual Meeting, April 16, 1981.

[8]Austin, D. The Assistant Principal: What Does He Do? Theory into Practice, 1979, 1, 68-72.

[9]School characteristics--and to a lesser degree personal characteristics--affect the content of the principal's job. Salley, C. McPherson, R., Baehr, M. What Principals Do: A Preliminary Occupational Analysis. In D. Erickson and T. Reller (Eds.) The Principal in Metropolitan Schools. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1979.

[10]Bridges, E. The Nature of Leadership.

[11]Bridges is talking about doctoral programs while only 29% of superintendents hold doctoral degrees and even fewer principals. The remainer receive training at the master's or post master's level on a part-time basis while employed as teachers or administrators. Bridges, E. The Nature of Leadership.

[12]March, J. Analytical Skills and the University Training of Educational Administrators.

[13]March, J. Analytical Skills and the University Training of Educational Administrators. The Journal of Educational Administration, 1974, 1, 28.

[14]See Culbertson, J. Preparing Educational Leaders for the Seventies. Columbus, Ohio: UCEA, 1969; Willower, D. Educational Administration and the Uses of Knowledge. UCEA Newsletter (1974), 4, 1-5; Farquhar, R. Preparatory Programs in Educational Administration. In L. Cunningham, W. Hack, and R. Nystrand (Eds.) Educational Administration: The Developing Decades. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1977; Griffiths, D. Preparation Programs for Administrators. In L. Cunningham, W. Hack, and R. Nystrand (Eds.) Educational Administration: The Developing Decades. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1977.

[15]Griffiths, D. Preparation Programs for Administrators.